

Nancy Staigmiller, Absarokee, Mt-

Testimony on SB 223 -Hate Crimes Bill

January 22, 2009

Today I speak in favor of the additions and changes to Senate Bill 223, as proposed by Senator Carol Juneau. I request your full support. All our citizens, or visitors, in our wonderful state of Montana need to be respected for any and all individual differences affecting them in the most personal of ways. Persons have already been protected in Montana law against malicious intimidation or harassment based on race, religion, color, and national origin. It is hard for me, and my family to understand why such respect has not already been granted to include victims of hate crimes focusing on disability, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

I ask you to reflect today on a few phrases I gleaned from our country's Presidential Inauguration just two days ago. In the opening prayer the minister asked for "forgiveness that in the past we have not shown respect to all whom God so lovingly made." We believe that God honors the uniqueness of every individual. In the benediction, a minister, sage and experienced, asked for God's help regarding human relations. "Help us to make choices on the side of love not hate, on the side of inclusion not exclusion, tolerance not intolerance." My hope is, in the important decision making that this body represents, that you honor these words of hope in your reflection and decisions.

Our Staigmiller family is a family of diversity by choice. My husband and I chose to start our family by adoption 40 years ago. We now have three grown children which includes two Afro-American children and one homemade child and his spouse and two small children. Our adopted son and daughter are affected by mild disabilities. They are both doing very well in their adult independent, productive lives. But the journey was not exactly always easy. I learned to advocate for their educational and medical needs, along with their needs of job training, etc. I also served for 21 years as an educator/advocate for lots of other children affected by different abilities in this state. The stories I could tell are many, and sometimes unbelievable, but please understand that many parents and their children have been affected by "malicious intimidation or harassment" primarily due to disability, and occasionally sexual orientation, perhaps in addition to their race or ethnic background. This is why I believe restorative justice must play an important role in our society.

Now, I would like to ask you, have you had the privilege of visiting a Holocaust Museum, perhaps in DC? If so, I am wondering what your reactions were to the stories told in words, pictures, and meaningful stories and mementoes of such a gruesome and strange time in fairly recent history of the world. Just sixty years ago, persons were imprisoned, caused to suffer and eradicated by genocide because of their unique diversity and individual differences, and or issues of gender differences/sexual orientation. Such outrageous crime and genocide still continue in our world, as we speak, in places such as Darfur, Sudan.

Our family sincerely requests your support for this bill, as we all strive in service for the well being of each other as citizens of Montana and the United States of America.